

Respect, distance, and socialization

The role of honorifics in Korean child-directed speech



uchicago
chatter lab

Chicago Linguistic Society
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Korean honorifics

relies most heavily on **verbal morphology**

→ e.g., honorific verbal suffix **-yo**

in addition to **lexical substitutions**

→

	words	age	to eat	to sleep	...
informal	말	나이	먹다	자다	...
honorific	말씀	연세	드시다	주무시다	...



Speech styles

	English name	Declarative ending
Honorific	“deferential” style	<i>-supnita</i>
	“polite” style	<i>-eyo</i>
Non-honorific	“intimate” style	<i>-e</i>
	“plain” style	<i>-ta</i>
Authoritative	“semiformal” style	<i>-(s)o</i>
	“familiar” style	<i>-ney</i>



Korean
has no
grammatical
gender

Korean
has six
speech levels

Brown, L. (2011 & 2015)

How to say “I’m sorry”

FORMALITY



Verbal suffix

“intimate” -e

“polite” -yo

“deferential” -nida

Stem

mian

joesong

미안
[mian]

미안해
[mianhae]

미안해요
[mianhaeyo]

죄송해요
[joesonghaeyo]

미안합니다
[mianhamnida]

죄송합니다
[joesonghamnida]

정말 죄송합니다
[jeongmal joesonghamnida]



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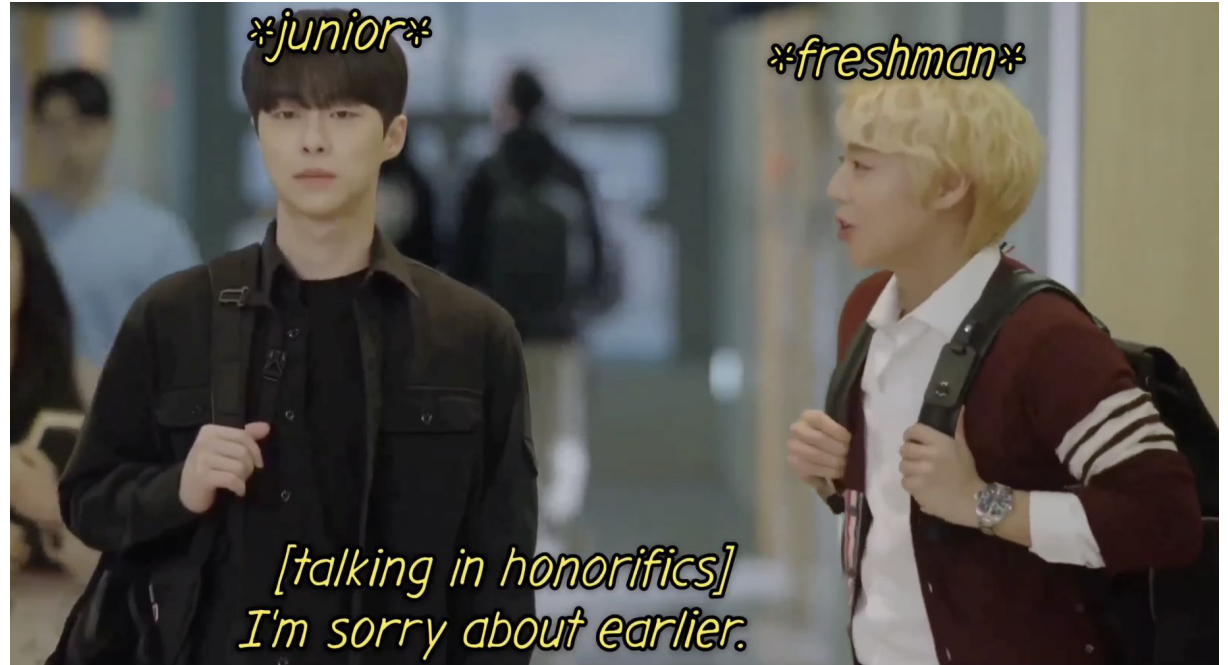


Respect



Social hierarchy:
vertical distance

(Kim & Sells, 2007)



Distance



Social closeness:
horizontal distance

(Brown, 2011)





...yo!



[언니 노릇을 똑똑]히 하시 [네요,]
[enni nolus-ul ttokttok]-hi ha-si-[ney-yo,]
sister role-AC clever-AD do-SH-APP-DC:POL (HON)
‘(You) are doing (your) part as an older sister very well.’

Socialization

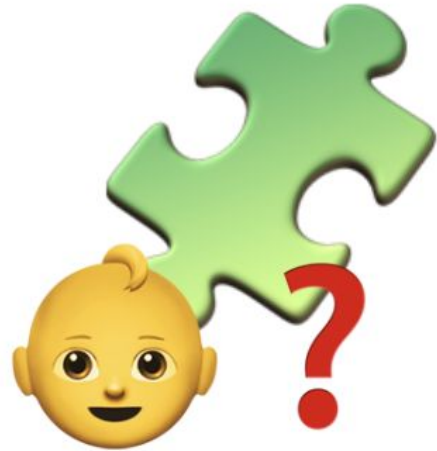


Role of honorifics in
language development
and socialization? 🤔

Ahn, 2020; Bae et al., 2024

Linguistic

Social



Speech style	Declarative ending
“deferential”	- <i>supnita</i>
“polite”	- <i>eyo</i>

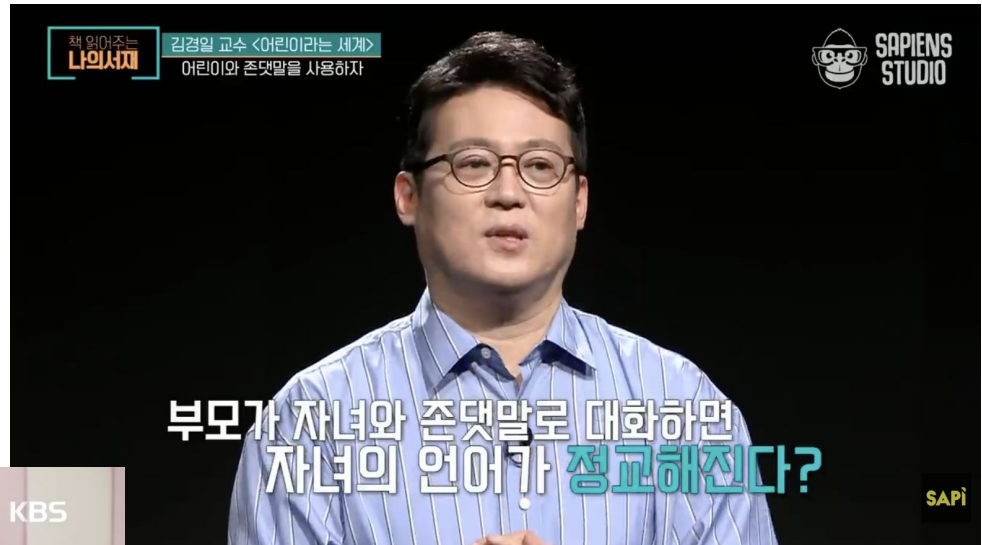


미안 [mian]
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미안합니다 [mianhamnida]
죄송합니다 [joesonghamnida]
정말 죄송합니다 [jeongmal joesonghamnida]

words	age	...
말	나이	...
말씀	연세	...

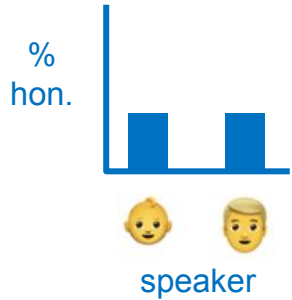
Kim & Park, 2010

Harmful for social development?



Beneficial for language development?

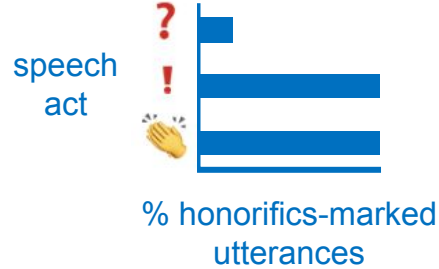
Distance



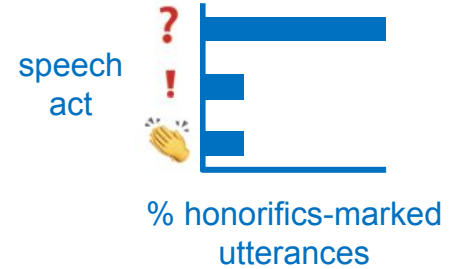
General linguistic marker



Behavioral socialization



Linguistic socialization



CHILDES Ko corpus



Naturalistic “home” recordings (audio only)

Age groups: 8, 13, 27mo
N: 30 (10 per age group)

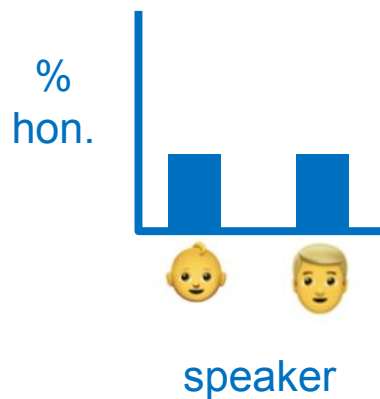
Avg rec. duration = 46.87 mins
(*SD* = 3.44)

Utterance-level speech act coding using Inventory of Communicative Acts - Abridged (INCA-A)

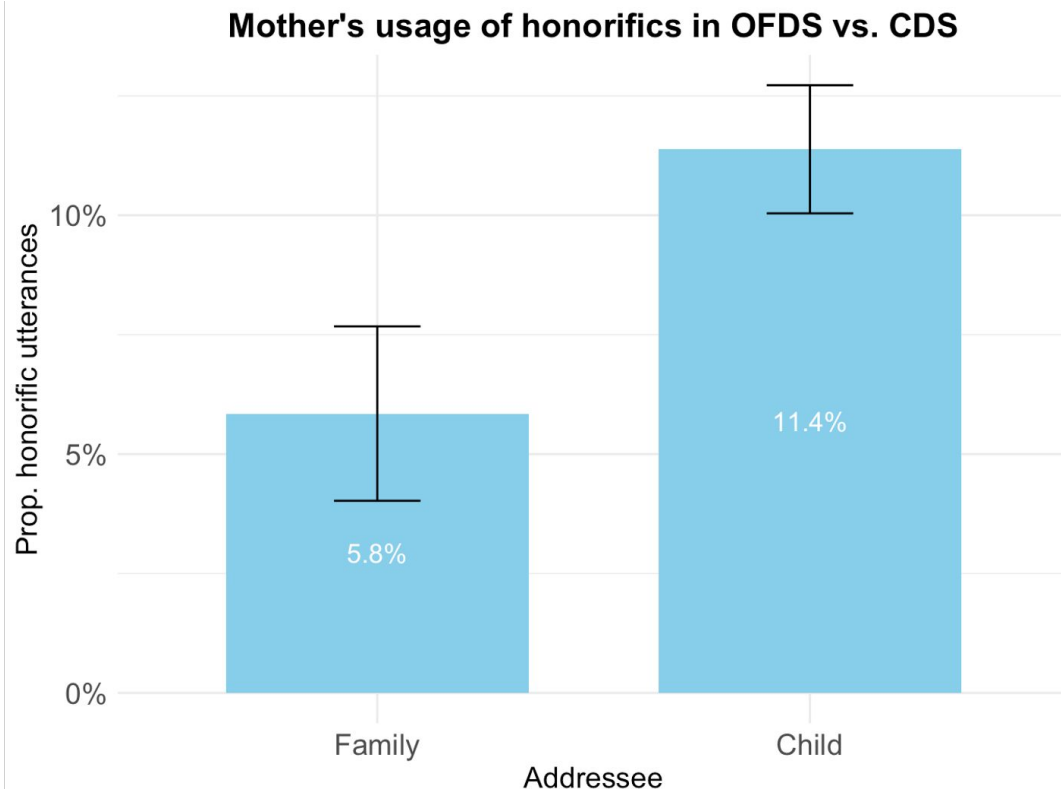
375	MOT	RQ	제일 큰 것부터 꺼 볼까요 그럼?	most big-ATTR thing-from put.on try-SUPP.SUGQ-HON then	Then shall we try on the biggest one first?
380	CHI	ST	엄마 안 돼.	mom not allowed	We can't Mom.
384	MOT	YQ	안 돼요?	not allowed-HON	We can't?
389	MOT	ST	할 수 있어요.	do-FUT.ATTR ability exist-HON	We can.

Ninio et al., 1994

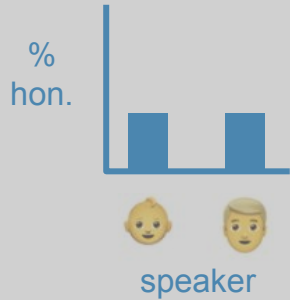
Does CDS honorifics solely index social distance?



$(t(28) = 3.16, p < 0.005$
adult baseline prop. = 78.6%)



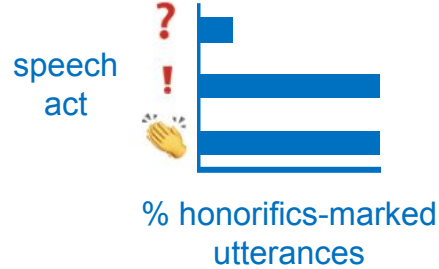
Distance



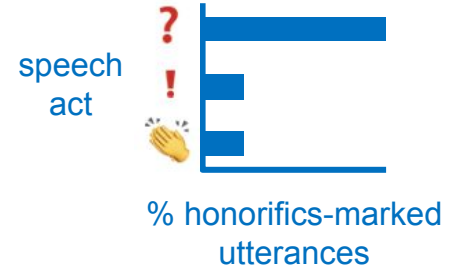
General linguistic marker



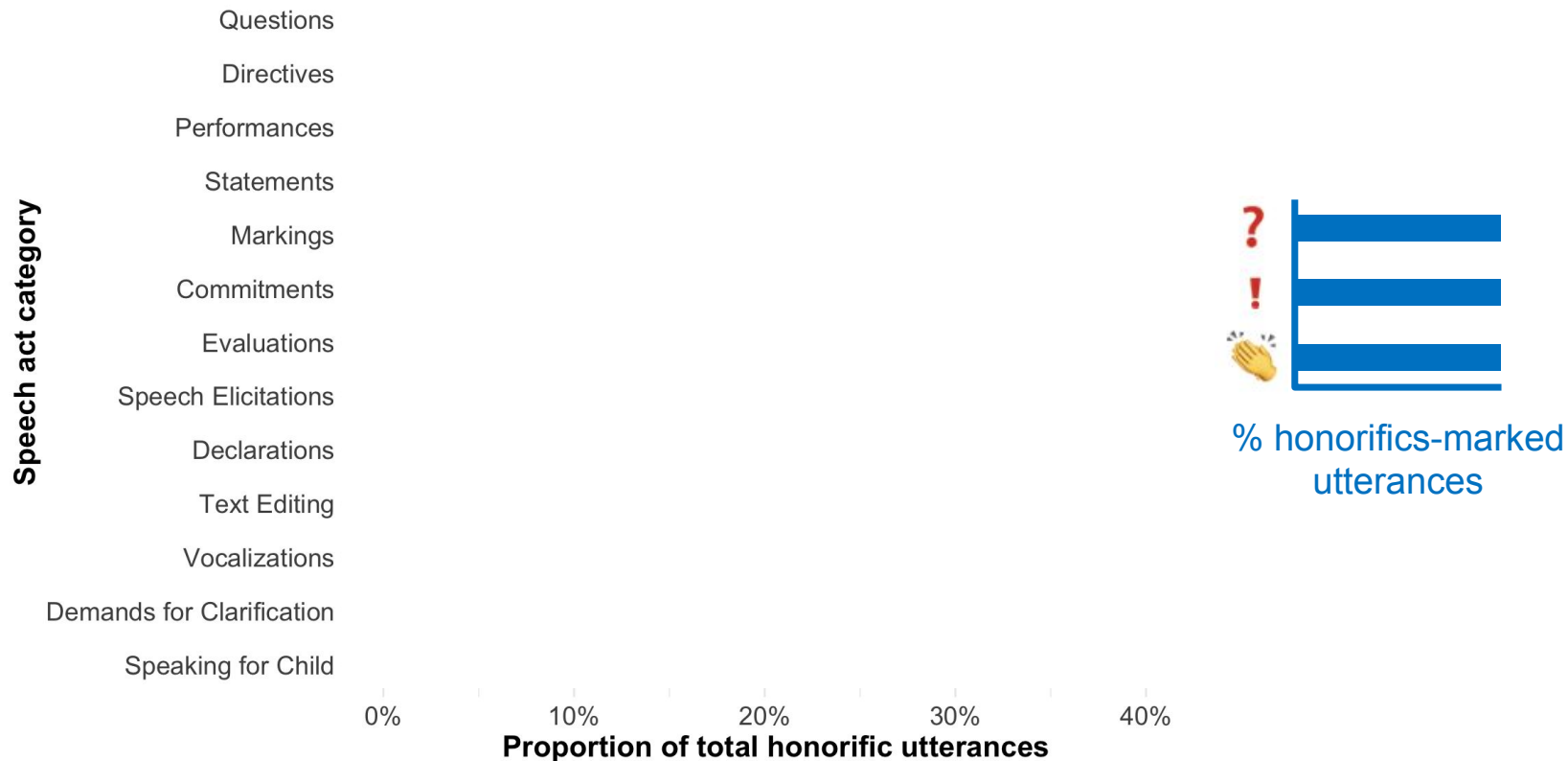
Behavioral socialization



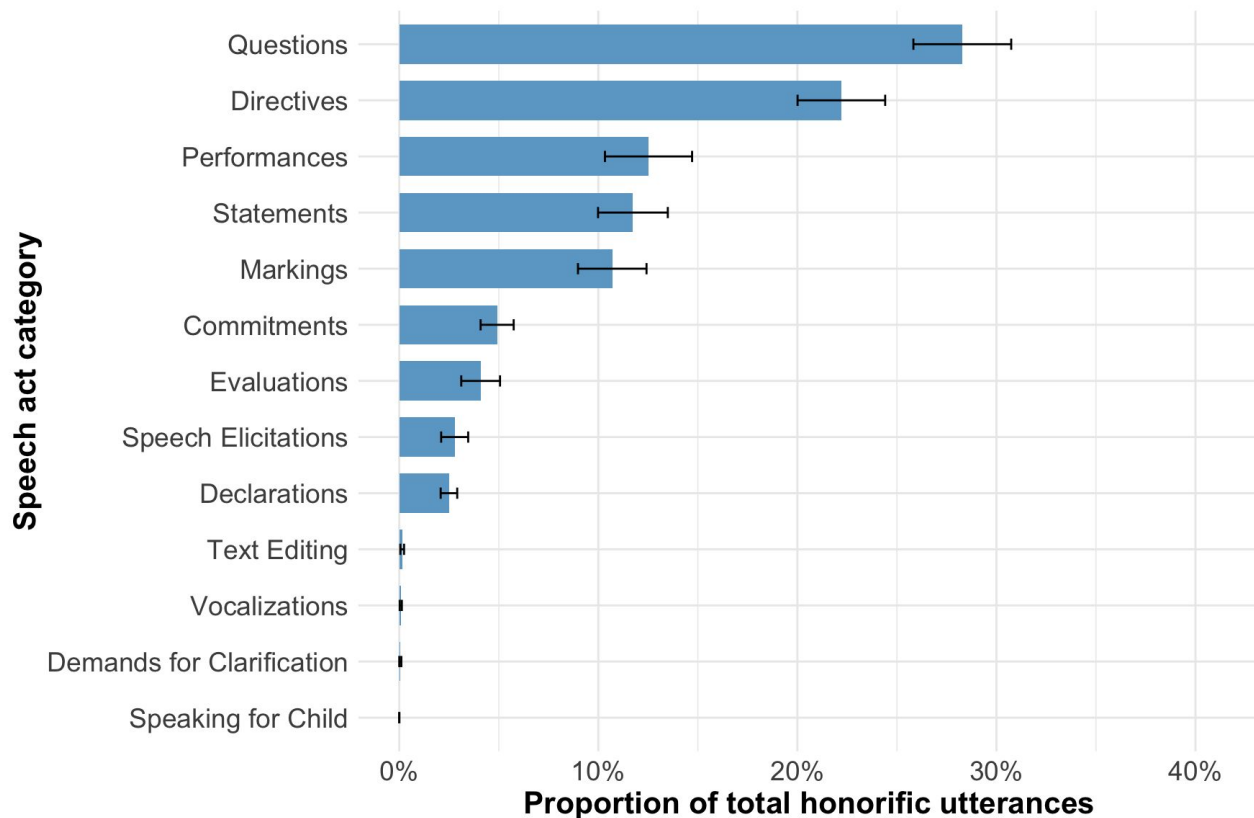
Linguistic socialization



Is CDS honorifics a general marker of linguistic input?

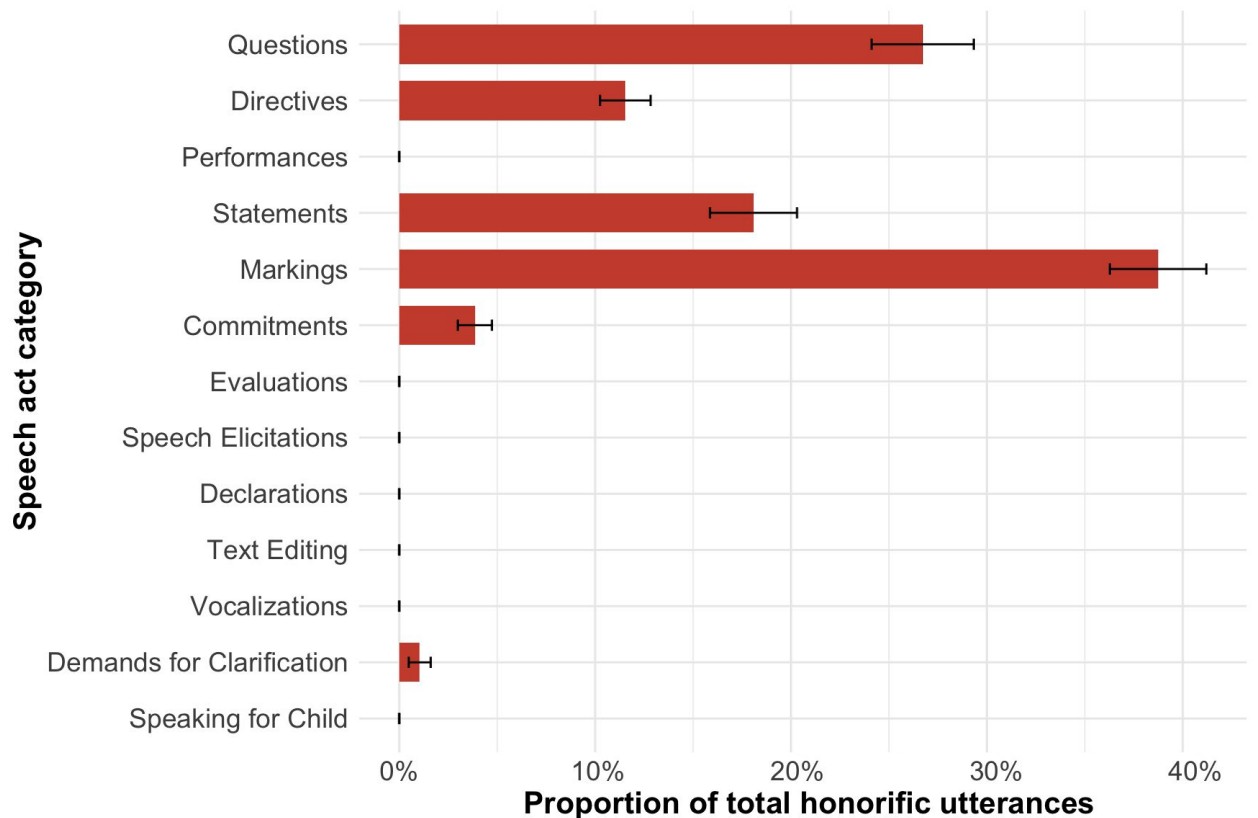


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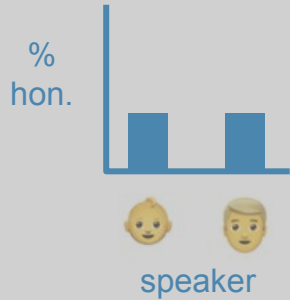


↑ freq. of speech act category \neq ↑ hon. markings ($p < 0.001$)

Is CDS honorifics a general marker of linguistic input?



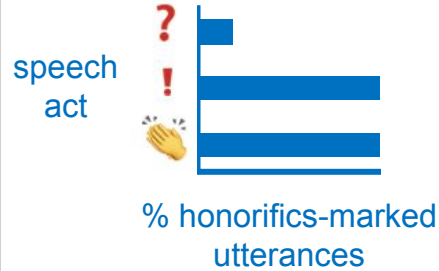
Distance



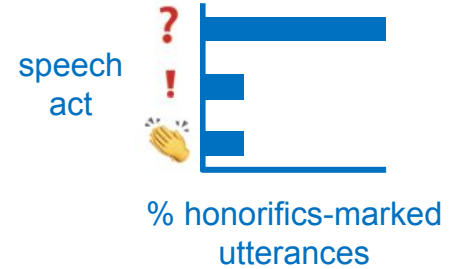
General linguistic marker



Behavioral socialization



Linguistic socialization



CDS honorifics seems to scaffold *both* **behavioral** and **linguistic** socialization!

Behavior management with **Directives** and **Evaluations**

에이 아파요 이렇게 하-면
INTERJ hurt-**HON** thus-ADV do-if
'Ouch, it hurts if (you) do it like this.'

일-어나-세요 이제 조끼 벗-고
rise-up-**HON** now vest take.off-CONN
'Please get up now and take off your vest.'

Building familiarity with politeness constructs through **Questions**

이거 뭐-예요
this-thing what-COP-**HON**
'What is this?'

뭐 하-고 놀-고 싶-어요
what do-CONN play-CONN want-**HON**
'What do you want to do (play)?'

CDS honorifics seems to scaffold *both* **behavioral** and **linguistic** socialization!

Modeling through **Performances** and **Speech Elicitations**

똑똑	문	열-어	주-세요
ONOM	door	open-CONN	give- HON -REQ
'Knock knock, please open the door.'			

안녕히	계세요	하-해
well	stay- HON	do-IMP
'Say, "Goodbye!"'		

no significant age-related patterns...

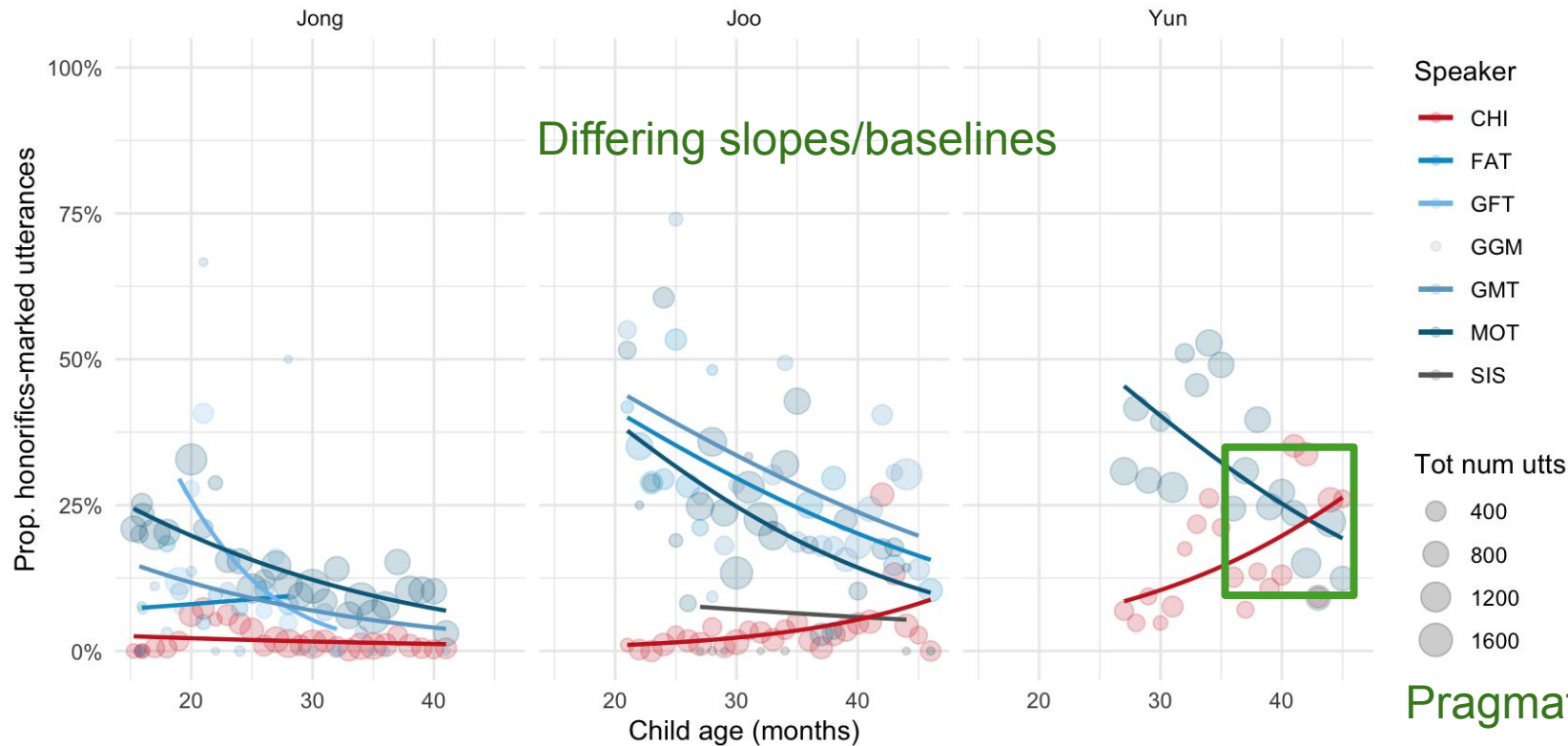
CHILDES Ryu corpus

Child	Age range	Gender	Total data
JONG	15-41mo	M	31hr 37min
JOO	21-46mo	F	29hr 2min
YUN	27-45mo	M	20hr 36min

81hr 15min

Prop. honorific utts by speaker over developmental trajectory

Caregivers (blue) vs. target child (red)

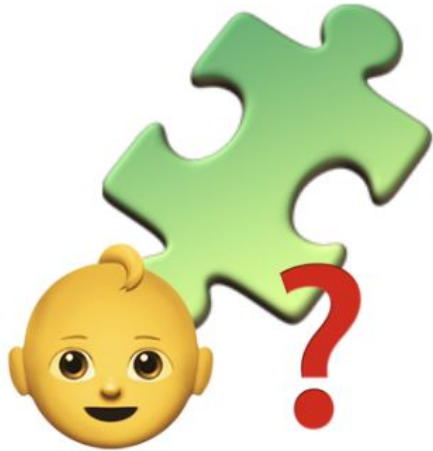


Pragmatic
handover

Honorifics in Korean child-directed speech

- Appears regularly (~11.5% of utterances)
- Does not statically index social hierarchy/social distance (prop. hon. in CDS > prop. hon. in OFDS)
- Serves a dynamic and didactic function (non-random dist. of hon. utts across speech act categories)
 - → selective socialization; spotlight 🔍
- Longitudinally, differing baselines/ slopes and pragmatic handover point 🤝

Directed speech



- ✓ Spotlighted functions of honorifics in indexing politeness (*respect?*) 🤔
- ✓ Explicit modeling of honorific functions of indexing *distance* (static association rather than dynamic inference?) 🤔
- ✗ Mapping onto broader social relationships



Thank you! 🙏

Data and scripts:



Cross-sectional



Longitudinal

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